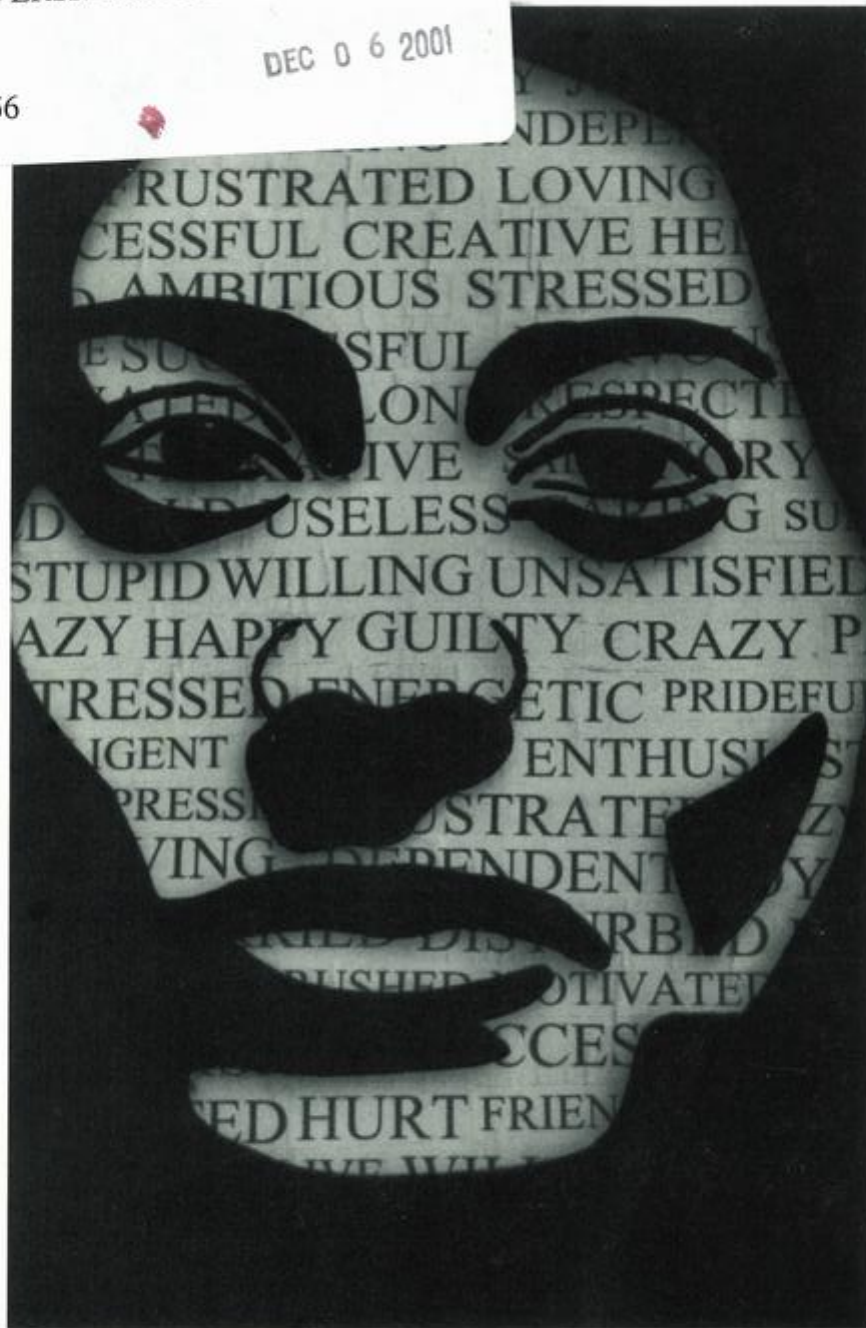


# The Minstrel

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Redeemer University College's Poetry and Fiction Magazine  
Volume 12, Winter 2001

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“The two most engaging powers of an author; new things are made familiar, and familiar things are made new.”

Samuel Johnson

**Editor:** Brett Dewing  
**Assistant Editor:** Judith Byl  
**Faculty Advisor:** Hugh Cook

**Cover Art:** Face Value  
Christina van den Ham

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**First Place  
Poetry**

**Without Thinking**

groggy, like coming out of anesthetic, you force your feet onto the frigid floor  
habit moves your muscles as you stumble to the washroom, a newborn horse -- unsteady  
the water, like vines, tangles over your skin awakening and hot  
shampoo mixes with shower steam  
rising like incense fragrant, filling the room  
you brush your teeth, the flavor of freshness and peppermints in church permeates your mouth  
this tunnel of morning routine you walk through  
moist and familiar  
dark, yet growing lighter  
your mute button unsticks itself  
noise cascades over you  
the angry roar of the flushing toilet, stampeding humans up and down the stairs, sharp  
sounds of contiguous cutlery separated, jumbled voices emitting kaleidoscope words  
then --

“HURRY UP!”

you exit the tunnel quickly through the front door  
morning routine complete  
new day  
beginning

Ruth Reitsma

### The First Death

Her father was a pig farmer, so it was perfectly natural for her to be involved with the lives and the deaths of the pigs. Most people don't have the opportunity to experience the mystery of birth before their eighth birthday, as she did. She rose early in the morning and put on her smelly clothes. She could still see her breath when she walked along the cracked, concrete path to the barn. It took her entire body weight to thrust open the sturdy wooden door, and when she did she was greeted with the ripe odour of pig. Most mornings her dad would beat her to the barn, but this particular morning she was the first intruder. The pigs were sleeping when she entered, and as she turned on the lights they began to wake up and grunt around in their pens. She walked slowly through the aisle, carefully keeping her rubber boots away from the pens. The pigs liked the taste of rubber boots in the morning. She walked past the ladder to the hay mow and past the Boar's pen. She didn't like the Boar. He always smelled peculiar, and he had bulky growths under his bum that made him cranky. Her mother told her later that the growths were taken off most of the pigs when they were piglets and that was what Daddy was doing with the knife when the piglets screamed so loud. As she passed the dirty old Boar, she moved a little faster because she was sure that he must be extra hungry for rubber boots. She rounded the corner and reached her destination. The pen in the corner was filled with soft straw. She climbed onto the metal rungs of the pen to take a closer look at its contents. In the middle of the straw, a swollen sow was groaning and snorting. Two of her legs were pointed up, and the other two were pressed against the straw. Her eyes were closed, and she was breathing in long, strenuous gasps. Her belly was the colour of oatmeal, and the skin was tight and firm. Daddy said the sow was going to have piglets very soon. She stared at the sow until Daddy came to the barn to feed the pigs. He told her that if the sow was going to have the babies he would get her right away. She went back to the house and ate breakfast with the others.

She waited all day for her father to tell her that the sow was ready. When it was time for bed, she begged her mother to let her go to the barn for just a while. Her mother agreed. The girl raced to the barn and pushed through the big door, past the hogs and the boar. The distended animal hadn't moved since the morning. Her eyes were wide open and glassy like black marbles. Her breath was coming out of her hard pink mouth in short gasps. The girl climbed over the metal rungs and settled in the corner of the pen on the straw. She was positioned so that she could stare at the end of the pig. Normally, this part of the pig looked like a pointy piece of flesh, the way she imagined a gnome's ear would look. The ear was usually light pink and the size of a walnut, but now it was red, swollen and pulsing. She stared at the opening for so long that when a tiny cloven hoof pushed its way through, she almost didn't see it. The hoof was red and slimy. As the girl stared, the hoof went back inside the sow and then it came out again, and the rest of the piglet followed. The piglet



squirmed on the straw, trying, within the first few moments of his life, to stand. The umbilical cord was purple and thick, leaving the bloody piglet attached to its mother. The girl reached out gently and pressed her thumb and forefinger onto the lumpy cord close to the piglet. The cord broke easily, and the girl picked up the tiny piglet. She wiped the miniature body with straw and set him at his mother's teat. The piglet shoved his snout greedily into the engorged nipple and began to drink immediately. The sow grunted with approval. By the time the girl moved back to the end of the sow, another piglet had squeezed out and was staggering around the straw. The girl released him from his mother and placed him at another waiting nipple. The girl did this seven more times, each time placing the new baby next to its mother. When the girl positioned herself behind the pig again, she gasped as she watched the afterbirth ooze out of the sow. Her daddy had told her to take this out of the pen with a pitchfork and put it in the gutter, or else the sow would eat it. The girl climbed out of the pen and found a fork near the hay mow. When she returned to the sow's pen, she saw one more tiny piglet laying in the afterbirth. She picked him up, but he wasn't moving. He was half the size of the others. As she was staring at the lifeless body in her hands, her daddy came into the barn. He smiled at the litter drinking happily. As he congratulated the girl, he noticed the runt. The girl's daddy picked up the pitchfork and tossed the afterbirth into the gutter.

"The little one didn't make it, eh Jenny?"

The girl looked at the bloody newborn and then at her daddy. "He just came out dead, Daddy." She held back tears as her daddy took the piglet from her hands and put it in the gutter. The girl's daddy hung a heat lamp over the sow and her nine wriggling babies. The girl was looking intently upon the warm, dry family of ten when her daddy said that now it was really time to go to bed. The girl turned her eyes from the yellow warmth of the pen to the cold dark of the gutter. The dead piglet had sunk into the mire, and, as the girl left for bed, only one, tiny cloven hoof could be seen.

Jenny Noordegraaf

isaac

you rose from the flaming wings of promise  
heaven the hatchling  
newborn and salted  
laughing at the blindness of paternity  
shook in an instant ashen corona  
and pointed to the sky

Brett Alan Dewing

### **Heartbeat**

Snow swirls thick around him  
wheels hit ice, reluctantly  
metal folds into mound  
glass punctures flesh  
screams fill night  
blood on snow  
Life Support  
eyes shuttered  
breathing resumes  
family squeeze hands  
cry tears of thankfulness  
that life still continues and  
the family circle is still complete.

Metta Van Brugge

### **Survival Smile**

Let us tie the corners of our mouths  
To heaven,  
So as we fall  
The strings will pull us  
To look  
Upon His grace,  
And with this light,  
See rainbows through our tears.  
The weight of pain  
May drown us,  
If we do not let heaven  
Pull us up.

Walter Miedema

## Counterfeit

her words, like  
honeyed coatings, on  
plastic inscriptions of  
dusted albums laid  
open for conscious display

she flirts with the items  
of store bought tags  
torn from the notes  
in her grand-  
daughter's hand

clothed in the latest  
seventy going on thirty  
thinned hips  
still moulded into  
Claiborne and Chanel

she looks down from a  
high pillar of salt,  
and mocks their  
attitudes on cucumbers' costs

coldness drips from  
green rectangular icicles  
frozen inside

white-washed superiority  
bought like rhinestone  
bracelets  
cheapened by the price  
of a Saran-wrapped  
airtight heart

suspended on the outskirts  
of life looking in  
vacant no one's home  
the car's out and the  
key is buried under a mountain  
of fashion magazines

she'll come home again  
kiss their eyes  
play a song  
waltz upstairs  
to the attic of her  
heart  
wash off her make-up  
stare in the mirror  
nothing

interest earned on a life invested  
in fraudulent, valium-laced dreams

Amy Hilborn

### **Threshold of Transcendence**

Are those mad lives over?  
The incubating time?  
Winter, and the chain of blood--  
God, how can I tell?  
The vision-- will it soar away,  
gone with a mean fast wind?  
Leaving me in shadows  
of delirious moments past and grim?  
    Trudging drunk through heavy mist  
    In the sleep of death . . .  
No. I grasp it in my heav'n-stretched mind,  
and will not look beneath.  
I would not want, cry, scream--  
but only ask to have the gift  
a thousand storms could never flood.  
Today and for eternity,  
It must be so--  
I must  
be free.

Tiffany Heerema

## Yggdrasil<sup>1</sup> in Frost

“We are accustomed to believe that our world was created by God speaking the Word;  
but, I ask, may it not rather be that he wrote it, wrote a Word so long  
we have yet to come to the end of it?”

– J. M. Coetzee, *Foe*

Whose words these are I think I know  
written on me dripping on me  
black with pungent denotations  
caking cracking slipping on me  
catch a glimpse of where to start  
the sprawling twining uberlogue  
but sliding glided gilded golden  
black to brown and drying molded

I am Shem the Penman<sup>2</sup>  
fresh from my art  
rethinking revising  
too late these drying  
words of waste ... all waste

but the tinny shivering Wind will cleanse  
with its wet white  
I am waiting waiting

His house is in the village though  
and I the woods the words the woulds  
searching for an unabridged thesaurus  
and a sponge

and there is Odin hanging in his tree<sup>3</sup>  
his power growing though he is thirsty  
his eye plucked out at a well as a fee  
he will not see me he will not see

below him Vishnu his skin is blue  
not seeing mine discolored too  
with all that he has yet to do  
he is dreaming dreaming<sup>4</sup>

He will not see me stopping here  
where the air smells of unstirred coals  
and the clouds that hang in the changeless sky  
and on the tree there grows a peach  
a fruit I do not dare to eat  
and Monarch sacs on every leaf  
and the sound of bears asleep in caves

and I consumed with my fetid flesh  
and all the miles I have yet to go  
and the unseen Wind  
is wishing wishing

To watch his words fill up with snow  
and slowly slowly lowly falling  
a heaven-dried melting tear  
then flecking flaking flocking down  
as wet and white and right and clean  
as all the dreams the world can't dream  
with shushing hushing flushing  
winter whisper in the Wind  
it is falling falling  
and all my words are running down  
between my clothes and  
wells with eyes and worms with wings and  
dreams and juice and on my skin  
beneath the filth the white-won Wind  
is writing writing

Brett Alan Dewing

<sup>1</sup>In Norse mythology, the worldtree.

<sup>2</sup>In *Finnegans Wake*, Shem the Penman writes over his entire body with ink made from his bodily wastes.

<sup>3</sup>In Norse mythology, Odin hanged himself as a sacrifice to himself, thereby increasing his power.

<sup>4</sup>The Hindus believe that Vishnu dreamed the world into existence.



artwork by Jamie Karlson

**Second Place  
Poetry**

**Star Haiku**

Did those who wished on  
the star over Bethlehem  
get what they wished for?

Anita Brinkman



## Buried

"He looks different, doesn't he?"

She lifted her foot and then placed it back down on the same wooden knot. The floor creaked under its pressure. All churches were the same.

The sun's rays struggled through the stained glass windows, casting little rainbows on the dark, pine walls. As she rocked back and forth in her seat, her neck ached from forcing her stare to remain on her shoes. A frown creased her forehead and deepened the hollows of her cheeks.

"Why do they put that much make-up on him? It makes him look like a girl."

Humming to herself inside her head, she endeavoured to block out the surrounding atmosphere. How long would it take to count to infinity using sheep?

"Aren't you ever going to look at him?"

She turned her head away, defiantly looking at the closed door of the sanctuary.

"I know you want to leave, but you're not being fair. You'll never deal with this if you don't look at him." His voice was getting louder and his presence bigger as his body loomed in front of her.

"Sheridan, c'mon, just look at him. It'll help. Hey, I'll even hold your hand, now that's something." He laughed, but his laughter sounded foreign and hurt her ears. Why would he laugh? What was wrong with him? Didn't he care?

"Leave me alone." Sheridan's voice came out in a low growl as she clamped her fingers together. "I just want to leave. You know I hate churches, why should I like them now?" Her head throbbed from the smell of musty hymnals and old carpets.

"Damn it Sheridan, don't you ever feel?"

She shrugged his hand off her shoulder. Crossing her arms against her breasts, she felt her body tremble. I hate it here, I hate it here, I hate it here. Her foot tapped against the floor as she chanted in her mind.

She watched him walk to the window. Da would have understood. He knew her better than anyone.

"Why did I have to bring you here? I knew that you wouldn't be able to handle it," he mumbled to himself, straightening his tie. "Mum thought it would be best for us to deal with it this way, before the others came. But look at you; you're still in denial."

She twisted her pale freckled finger around a loose strand of hair. Her stomach was starting to make protests, and yet she didn't feel hungry at all. She wondered what he'd do if she just ran out of here. Da would understand, he knew she hated it here. He wouldn't force her to look at that strange, ugly ghost. He understood her.

"Mum was right. I'm going to have to be the strong one as usual. I'm going to have to take charge. Me. How could you be any help to me if you can't even face him? Can you?" He walked towards her again, his voice cutting into her soul.

He knew where to attack. He knew her weaknesses.

"Why do you hate me so much?" she whispered. Her black eyes sought his.

"I don't. Now don't be a brat. I just want you to be able to face your ghosts and get over it. I...." He stuttered, startled by her question. He began to pace the room.

"You want more than that." Pain shot through her body as a thick layer of guilt began to stir inside her heart. He knows, he hates me, he always has.

"Stop it. I don't want to argue. Can you please just look at him? Soon everyone will be here."

Her knees shook, and her legs had no feeling. Her arms hung like dead branches at her sides. As she rose to her feet, her shoulders slumped and could barely carry the weight of her drooping head. She stared down at her shoes.

"What's wrong with you? You look dead too. Is that what you're trying to do?" he sighed, his eyes narrowing. "Whatever you're trying to pull, that's not going to bring him back. He's dead. You see. He's right over there, dead."

"Stop!" Her heart started to pound, and she knew she had to get out of this suffocating room. One sheep, two sheep, three sheep....

"Sheridan!" he grabbed her roughly by the shoulders and shook her as her thin hair whipped his cheeks. "Why didn't you listen to Mum, why didn't you? Look what you've done. You should never have left him. Now no one will ever be able to understand you. Now we're left with you."

Her body felt ready to buckle; she didn't want to die in a church. She had to get out. His words were stripping her of her skin; she could almost taste blood on her lips. Blood, his blood welling up within her bleeding heart. It was all her fault.

"You're just going to have to find a new saviour somewhere else. He's not coming back. Da's...." Shaken with the finality of his own words, his body collapsed onto the nearby pew, and he began to weep.

No tears dropped from her eyes as she turned and headed for the door. The door slammed behind her, and she didn't look back. She had buried everything else, and she could bury this too. If she refused to feel then maybe infinity would come.

Amy Hilborn

### completion

i want  
to weep – and wash you from  
my broken-slate heart  
restoring it to some sameness  
of what it was  
(i cannot)

Judith Byl

### **My Friend**

the way unfair treatment of a puppy hurts  
hearts, squeezes them, wringing out sympathy  
like blood dripping into a rain-filled  
puddle and diffusing;

so I feel about you.

Ruth Reitsma

### **(untitled)**

a red door, and a brown body  
black shoes, a newborn baby  
one king standing tall, mirrored with twenty-one kings  
just as brave and just as tall  
a fountain through glass  
a son, a daughter  
a father, my mother  
inhibited reliant standing taller  
O ever will I be  
evasive in this network no smaller  
than the vision of hope.

Brandon Hiddink

### **Missionary**

We forget  
what we forced  
on you while  
we were wearing white  
cotton dresses and our  
men were reading sagely  
from their leather-  
bound books of truth.

We forget  
what you accepted  
while we accepted  
your too-salty bread  
and boiled water.

We forget what  
was so important  
for us to tell you.

And you saw  
the big square paper  
with the coloured blobs  
that represented us.

We were big and pink  
and you were a  
tiny green speck.

And now  
you believe  
what we forced on you  
and we forget.

Jenny Noordegraaf

## **Wind**

Ah, the lovely winds of Hamilton.  
They blow the hair away from my cheek,  
curl around the handlebars of my three-speed bike,  
tug -playfully- at my backpack flap,  
send chilly love-shivers up my open sleeve, and  
I ... smile...  
As I bike into them.

Anita Brinkman

## **“A Time to Search, and a Time to Give Up”**

caught in the cycle  
time to be born; time to die  
‘What is in between signifies nothing.’  
anxiety, absurdity  
to be, to simply be  
a stone simply exists  
to authentically be!  
Impossible: eat-drink-die  
embrace meaningless  
thesis-antithesis-synthesis(just another thesis)  
demand the answer to ‘The Question’  
being becomes nothing-  
-nothing is left to hear the answer  
negation of solutions is a solution  
simply be  
embrace the absurdity!  
—or don’t, doesn’t matter, eh?

Dan Horton

## companionship

a winter night not unlike  
a group of seven christmas cards,  
you and i good friends wrapped  
in scarves fitted with mittens we  
knitted for each other chins  
ducked as we walk together on the  
    crisp cool crust of snow on the laneway  
        wander  
            gathering drifts  
        rubber soles of boots pressing  
stamps into snow  
        that will soon be  
            forcibly forgotten  
        by the wicked  
            wind that whispers  
into my ears sweeps  
        between the two of us licks  
                    skin of my neck as the  
                menace that it is but i  
  
force my shoulders up  
listen to your voice which is much warmer than  
the wind that threatens to  
                undo  
            me  
  
i look to our feet so i can match  
    my    steps  
    with  yours  
and in this moment  
    we are children we are (best) friends  
    we should have a heart-  
    warming soundtrack  
    to match the harmony of our stepping  
    we would win any threelegged race  
    maybe even over anne&diana  
  
we walk together  
this winternight.  
  
i look at the stars

which are silver in the stark  
sky—who could not on such  
a night as the startling white  
penetrates the outer concentric  
sphere of ether pocked by peepholes  
flowing light from the ultimate and radiant beauty  
too still too pure too real to  
even be real infinity that overwhelms  
in gasping loveliness.

Judith Byl

### Letting Go

As I grow older  
and time passes by  
changes start taking place  
but I'm afraid to fly.  
Letting go is hard to do  
comforts must be left behind  
each time I'm called to say good-bye  
fear forms in my mind.  
But though I oft despise it  
time still travels on.  
I must learn to use it well,  
before I find it gone.  
I will grow older  
and time will pass by.  
Life will change forevermore  
and I must learn to fly.

Osanna Deelstra



## Captured

An old beat-up camera hangs heavily  
around my neck  
and waits patiently for that  
perfect moment.  
It focuses on wine glasses  
filled to the brim  
on a dining table set for eight;  
It zooms in on a gold band  
placed delicately on a trembling finger  
as tears fall silently to the floor;  
It follows a baby girl  
smiling as she places one foot  
in front of the other,  
wobbly legs taking their first steps  
toward a mother's outstretched hand;  
It scans the sky at sunrise  
as colours mix in fantastical arrangements  
and again at sunset,  
when the light slowly  
fades into the horizon;  
It is there for the first dance,  
silver ties and long dresses;  
For the child dressed as a pirate  
on a cold October night;  
For tinsel and twinkling lights  
meticulously placed on an evergreen;  
For a goodbye embrace  
before the final boarding.  
Through an old beat-up camera,  
I learn what it looks like  
to love,  
to laugh,  
to rejoice in new beginnings and part  
with things of the past  
And  
with the push of my finger  
and a flash of white bright light,  
these lessons are forever captured  
in motionless images.

Christine van Hasselt

### **“It’s the Most Wonderful Time of the Year.”**

The room is plastic with holiday cheer. An unnatural coniferous tree looms in the corner, its branches sagging with the weight of gaudy plastic baubles and assorted, aging homemade decorations. Several floral couches are scattered throughout the room, their pink bouquets looking hideous beside the red of the Christmas candles. Chairs and square tables are crowding the room. Varied casserole dishes and glassware will be spread over the elongated table along the far wall, and coats are piling up on top of the piano (someone has) recently pushed into the corner; no music this Christmas. People are milling around conversing with each other as you enter.

“Merry Christmas Aunt Lynda...yes, school is going well...nope, still single—

Merry Christmas Uncle Fred...yes, I am enjoying school...no, no boyfriend yet—

Grandma...it’s good to see you, Merry Christmas...I’m well, and yourself?

Aunt Millie, Merry Christmas...close, it’s actually my fourth year...no, this is not an engagement ring—

Mom, where do I put these cookies?

Hey Tyler, you look so tall! How many fingers-old are you this year?

Aunt Jayne, Merry Christmas...no— I don’t have time for dating...no, I’m still in school..actually not high school, university— ”

You arrive. Kitchen sanctity.

You place the cookies on the counter and search for some menial task to occupy yourself in this food-filled haven. Yes, the styrofoam cups should be washed; nothing can ever be too clean. You wash slowly; dinner is still two full hours away. If you close your eyes, you can imagine the warm water of the sink sliding over your entire body as you sink into a...bubble-filled bathtub? Your muscles are physically beginning to uncoil. Maybe you will survive this—

“Oh! Aunt Jayne, you startled me...I know styrofoam cups come wrapped in plastic, I just thought they looked a little dusty...Sure, I can man the oven for you...Not a problem.”

Ah ha. A real task. Now you have an actual reason for lingering in the kitchen. You pre-heat the oven and insert the first two casseroles to be heated— one tuna and the other a shepherd’s pie. This job will occupy you until dinnertime. Swiftly joy fills your heart, and an attitude nearing thankfulness wells up; you are glad you have

come. Who else would have rescued Aunt Jayne from this two-hour task of heat-filled, intensive oven watching, and willingly too? You are a solitary being, ready to tackle thankless chores. You are a carrier of the Christmas reunion-kitchen-torch, passed from one generation of women to the next. You are practically first in line for the Nobel Prize in Attitude (you are aware that such an award doesn't exist, but feel that it should). You are...

...raising your arms in a triumphant salute.  
"Uncle Fred! I'm actually just stretching."

You watch his retreating back, seeing instead the horrified expression his face had worn moments earlier. You know that Aunt Millie will hear about this one, and that she'll finally agree with Uncle Fred that not having children (those time-consuming, money-depleting, strange creatures with vaguely familiar physical features and mannerisms) had been the right decision. He might tell your mother too. Yet another unexplainable event that your mother can wield against you during one of those argue-about-nothing moments the two of you have had recently. All of this feels like recycled puberty. Your self-pity weighs you down suddenly, and your eyes feel wet. Wet like the snow outside the window. It's Christmas time. You shouldn't be crying, you should be caroling or wrapping presents, or—

"Aunt Lynda! No, I'm fine...it's just the heat in here, and maybe the dust...don't worry, I'm fine...really."

Perfect. Now, not only are you perceived as an emotional basketcase who abnormally stretches in the kitchen, but you have also finished heating all the casseroles. It is dinnertime, time to leave the kitchen. You timidly exit, searching for an empty chair. The only one you spot, the one you will be sitting in, is made of brightly coloured plastic and is surrounded by young humans. You console yourself with the realization that being forgotten actually works to your advantage; now you can be the one making patronizing small talk.

---

"Anna...ANNA. Your father is already in the car, Hurry Up. We're going to be late, I just know we're late. Your Aunt Millie will get there first with Her tuna casserole and then everyone will think mine is unoriginal – HURRY Anna – and Sherry is bringing a boy with her this year. Aunt Lynda has been bragging non-stop and asking about you of course—"

As you slide into your coat, you scowl into the hall mirror. You know that this year will be the same as last year.

